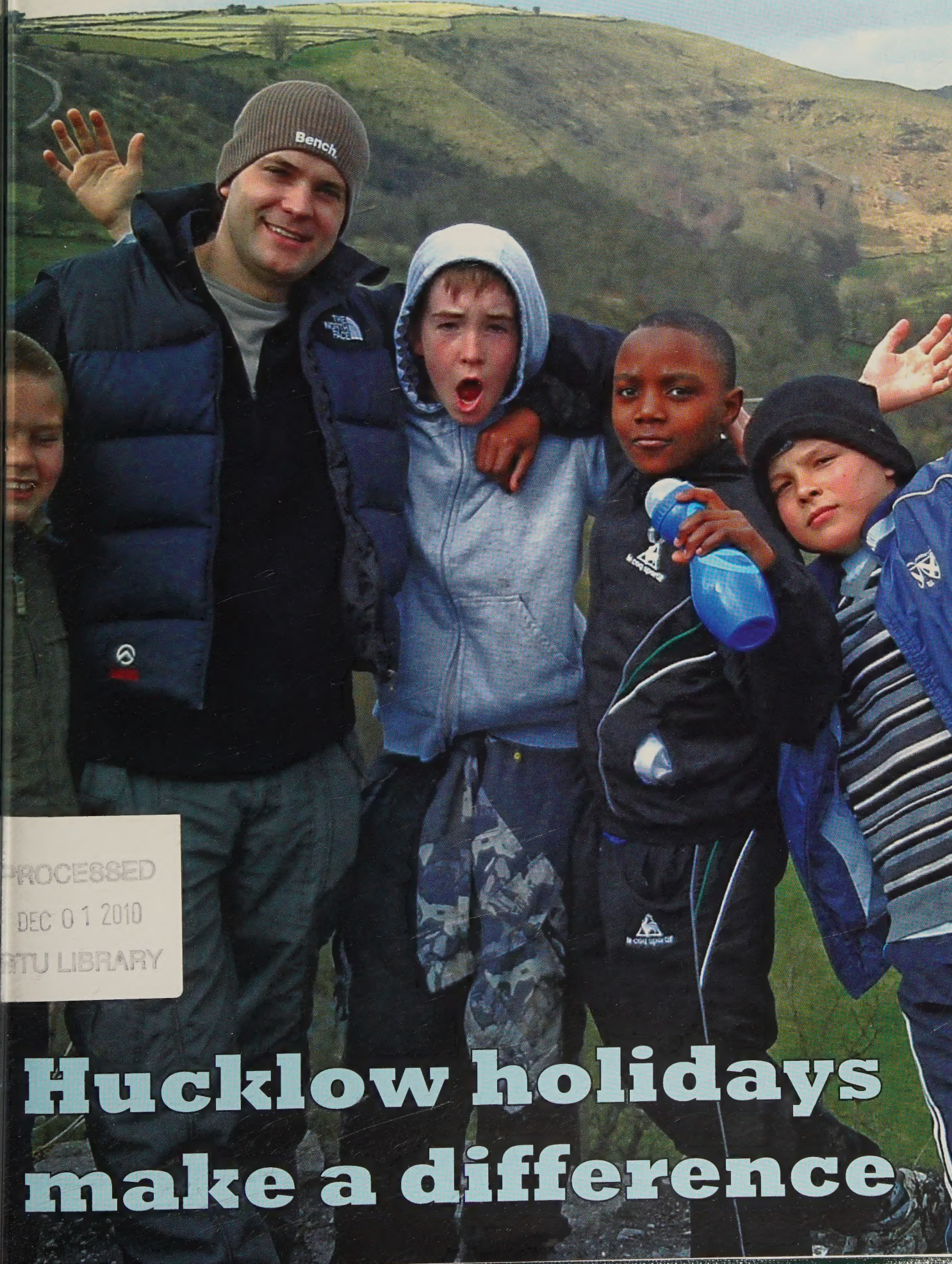


The INQUIRER

80p

www.inquirer.org.uk

the voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians Issue 7759 27 November 2010



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Hucklow holidays make a difference

Hucklow: 'My dream hotel'



By Peter B Godfrey

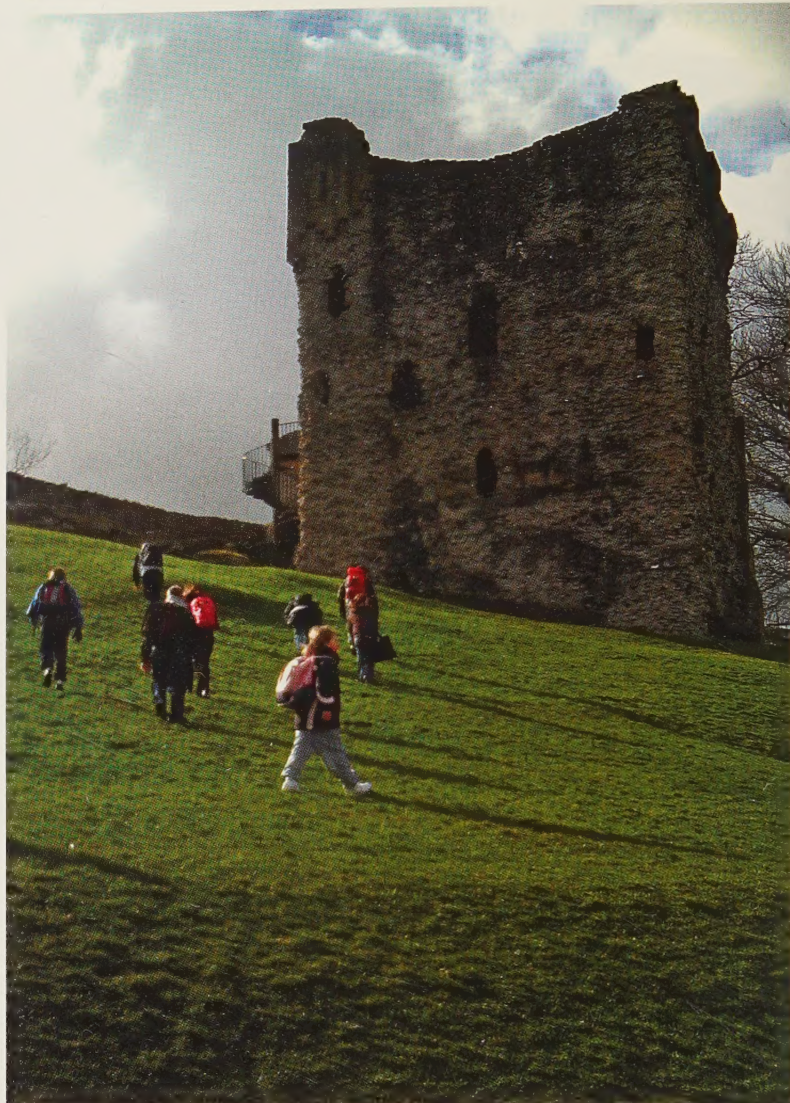
The trustees of the Send a Child to Hucklow Fund met at Great Hucklow on Saturday 6 November for their Annual General Meeting. All of the arrangements for the holidays are managed from this single meeting each year. Reports at the meeting showed, once again, how valuable the holidays are for 'children in need'. As usual, the children's own comments were often enlightening: 'It made me more independant because I have not been away from my mum for five whole days and it made me independant to get away from my sisters. It taught me a life skill sitting at a table with people instead of in front of the television. The dinner was delicious so was the puddings...' '...my dream hotel!' 'It made me feel independant and free because my little sisters are a little pains.'

The Fund provided eleven holidays in 2010. Children came from Bolton, Mansfield, Nottingham, Manchester, Stalybridge, Towcester, Wigan and Liverpool (four groups). Income from direct giving was £25,851. Interest, dividends and reclaimed income tax brought in a further £8759. Other particularly generous donations came from the Gorse Bank Trust, the James Henry Blake Charity, the Freemasons of Nottingham, Elliott Mason's Lodge and the bus and coach staff at Manchester Airport. We received a legacy of £20,000 from the estate of the late Janice Rees and gifts totalling £450 in memory of Robert and Eileen Austin, Vera Geddes, Frank Hytch and Cath Mayor. Special occasions have brought gifts. Happy 90th birthday to Joan Wylie. Happy Golden Wedding Anniverary to Bill and Dinky Humphreys. Happy Silver Wedding Anniversary to Mrs Margaret Horton. Gifts can now be made very easily via our website: www.sendachildtohucklow.org.uk

Expenditure totalled £60,332 of which £58,000 was spent on the children's holidays and £2326 on administration and publicity.

Very many thanks to the fund's many supporters. Your support for the 2011 holidays will be deeply appreciated.

Peter B Godfrey is chairman of the Send-a-child-to-HucklowTrust



Children on Hucklow holidays did exercises at the Nightingale Centre, climbed up to Peveril Castle in Castleton and cuddled guinea pigs.

Advent Anticipation

Autumn's beauty has been
blown away,
Winter's darkness enfolds us,
and Spring seems a distant
prospect;

but your light and hope have
not
abandoned us, O God
whom
we abandon.

We give our thanks
for the great festival that now
approaches,
as we give thanks for him
whose birth it
celebrates.

May your love in him
be bright before us and within
us
in this time of anticipation.

— Cliff Reed

Photo by Hans Kristian Pedersen

The Send-a-Child-to-Hucklow Fund

There were eleven holidays in 2010. The children's descriptions of what the holidays meant to them are deeply moving.

Thank you for helping to make these holiday possible.

Please help us

to continue giving needy children a country holiday.

Your gifts in 2009/2010 amounted to the excellent sum of £25,851 **Very, very many thanks.**

Your gifts for the 2011 holidays will be as deeply appreciated as ever. **Our target is £30,000 for direct donations. It costs approximately £250 per child and we hope to send two hundred children in 2011.**

Gifts will be gratefully received by the Hon. Assistant Treasurer, Rev. Chris Goacher, 19 De Montfort Road, Hinckley, Leics., LE10 1LQ. Please note that the Fund can reclaim income tax paid by any individual (as long as s/he has paid income tax) if a Gift Aid Donation form has been signed. This is now a vital part of the fund's income. Please help in this way if you can. A copy of this form will be inserted in a December issue of *The Inquirer*, or may be obtained from Mr. Goacher. Giving with a Gift Aid Donation form makes a gift of £20 worth £25.65 to the Fund. Gifts may now be made very easily on line by going to our website: www.sendachildtohucklow.org.uk

The Fund is a registered charity number 271585. All gifts are used for the holidays except for gifts in memory of someone that are put into a Capital Account and the interest is used for holidays. Please remember the Fund in your will. Legacies are a much appreciated and valuable income.

Copies of the report and appeal may be obtained from the Hon. Secretary Rev Ernest Baker, 145 Tullibardine Road, Sheffield, South Yorks., S11 7GN, telephone 0114 266 1070.

The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

Established 1842

The Inquirer is the oldest
Nonconformist religious newspaper

"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

*From the Object passed at the
General Assembly of the Unitarian and
Free Christian Churches 2001*

The Inquirer is published fortnightly by The Inquirer Publishing Company (2004), Registered Charity 1101039.

Articles express the views of their authors. Submissions are welcome and may be edited for content and length. They should be emailed or typed and should be the author's original work or be attributed appropriately.

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Annual subscriptions are £29.
Cheques payable to The Inquirer.

Advertise for £6 per column cm, on 3-col page, plus VAT or £7.50 per col cm, on a 2-col page. A one-page supplement is £200. One column on a 2-col page is £100, on a 3-col page, £75. A5 fliers may be inserted for £70 plus VAT. Deadlines are available from the editor.

Births, marriages and deaths are 50p a word plus VAT.

Editor M Colleen Burns
46A Newmarket Road
Cringleford
Norwich NR4 6UF
ph: 01603 505281

e: inquirer@btinternet.com

Copyeditor Sarah Reynolds

Cover photo Ernest Baker

Find out more about the Unitarian and Free Christian movement or locate a congregation. Log on to www.unitarian.org.uk or email info@unitarian.org.uk

Write to

The General Assembly
Essex Hall
1-6 Essex Street
London WC2R 3HY
ph: 0207 2402384

Inquiring Words

Be ours a religion...

Be ours a religion which, like sunshine, goes everywhere;
its temple, all space;
its shrine, the good heart;
its creed, all truth;
its ritual, works of love;
its profession of faith, divine living.

— Theodore Parker

Say 'Unitarian' on census

Something on the Guardian newspaper's website recently caught my husband David's attention (See: <http://bit.ly/9bddsp>) and I wanted to share it with you. The British Humanist Association (BHA) is holding an awareness raising campaign in advance of the next National Census which will be conducted in 2011. They want people who are 'Non-Believers' or 'seriously lapsed' to stop entering 'Christian' in the Census form in their answer to the question 'What is your religion'. The BHA maintains that people are becoming less religious but are failing to make this clear by automatically writing 'Christian' in this part of the census return.

They consider that for the past 10 years public figures have justified spending large amounts of money and giving support to religious groups on the basis of the artificially high numbers of Christians recorded on census returns. Statistics show that 37.3 million people stated their religion as 'Christian', but these figures are not reflected in church attendance. This false data, it is argued, has been used to increase the number of 'faith' schools, make public funding available to religious groups and keep the Bishops in the House of Lords as of right.

This news item led me on to wonder how many of us, when completing official documents, make the distinction that we are different from mainstream religious groups? For example, do we take the opportunity to write **Unitarian** when completing the section on *Religion* on hospital forms? The name of our denomination is still unrecognised by large numbers of the general public, so oughtn't we to take every opportunity to make Unitarianism better known?

Let's make sure that Unitarians are properly represented in the latest census statistics by encouraging all of us to enter '**Unitarian**', with pride, when we complete our forms next year.

— Hazel Warhurst

Chair, Stockton Unitarians

Census Day is 27 March 2011. Everyone is required by law to complete the census form. All questions are compulsory except the one about your religion, which is voluntary.

With thanks

This colour issue of *The Inquirer* was sponsored by the Octagon Unitarian Chapel, Norwich. For information about the congregation, see page 11.

From the GA

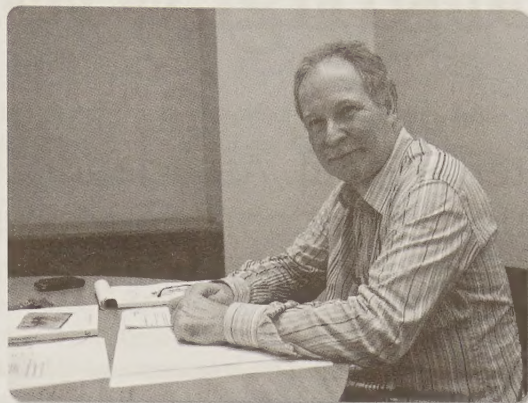
Key Messages

Executive Committee - Nov 10

1. Strategic Priorities - The Executive Committee is working in a focused and direct way to deliver the aims and objectives of the Strategic Priorities, which reflect the consultation held with the Denomination and were agreed at the last meeting. This includes reviewing the Commission and Panel structures. A constructive and positive discussion took place with Commission Chairs or their representatives, who had been specially invited to the meeting, with regard to proposals for change to ensure that we are able to effectively deliver the Strategic Priorities.

2. New Executive Committee Convenor Appointed Sir Peter Soulsby MP has tendered his resignation as Executive Committee Convenor following his appointment to the Opposition frontbench. He will remain a member of the Executive Committee. Martin Whitell has been appointed as Convenor until May 2011.

3. General Assembly Vice President - It was agreed that the period for receipt of nominations for the position of Vice President of the General Assembly be extended until 19 January 2011 with a decision at the next



Rev. Martin Whitell - New EC Convenor

Executive Committee meeting on 22nd January 2011. A letter has gone out to secretaries of congregations, districts and affiliated societies encouraging them to identify suitable individuals for this important role.

4. Executive Committee Election - A report was received from the Electoral Panel. The Executive Committee will seek authority at the Annual Meetings by an amendment to the GA Constitution to enable it to co-opt a member to fill the vacancy in membership from April 2011. A Constitutional Group is also to be established to bring proposals to the 2012 Annual Meetings on the electoral process, terms of office and frequency of election.

5. General Assembly Finances - The initial report on financial performance for the financial year ending 30th September 2010 shows a likely deficit of around £8,000; an improvement on the previous year's position of a loss of £29,000. This is excellent news given the current financial pressures facing us all. A budget for the new financial year was agreed with continuing support for current programmes, a requirement for savings in travel and expenses and draw down of one-off funding. Work on a fund-raising initiative was initiated.

6. Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow - The Nightingale Centre was congratulated on its financial performance and the improved facilities.



EC in the refurbished Lindsey Room at Essex Hall

New GA Photographer Required

After many decades, John Hewerdine has announced that the Unitarian Meetings in Swansea in 2011 will be his last as the official photographer. John has said that he misses so much of the meetings performing this task, he would really like to be able to start attending as a normal delegate from 2012.

The Annual Meetings Panel is looking for a new person to take on this role, someone who can work with John in Swansea to get a better understanding of what this job involves and then to work solo in future years. It needs to be someone who can do the job for many years to come and who will not mind missing out all the sessions as so much time is required for this job. Anyone interested should contact Andrew Mason at amason@unitarian.org.uk

'History of Essex Hall' Online

The text and images of a book by Mortimer Rowe written in 1959 is now available online. The publication describes the origins of the Unitarian presence on the site and the rebuild after the war. See the last link on: www.thega.org.uk/support

Unitarian Greetings Cards

The colour card (blank inside - good for all occasions) has been designed by our young people, with all profits supporting the Youth Programme. A pack of 10 cards is just £4.95 (+60p p&p). You can purchase these either by visiting Essex Hall (and save the postage) or order online at www.yuponline.org.uk



Working with many faiths to

Peter Morales, speaking at the International Association for Religious Freedom Congress, answers the assertion that faith is the root of hatred.

If one wanted to make the case that the human race would be better off without religion, one need not look far. There is lots of evidence at hand. Events such as the September 11 attacks come to mind. Historic periods like the Spanish Inquisition provide lots of support. Religion has been at the centre of many unspeakable horrors throughout the ages. How many people have died because they were labelled heretics or infidels? How many millions have been oppressed in the name of religion? In my home hemisphere, religion was an integral part of colonial oppression for centuries.

In the last decade a number of books and films have attacked all religion. I think of books like *The End of Faith* and *The God Delusion*, each of which became best sellers and the subject of endless television discussions. The film *Religulous* ridiculed commonly held beliefs. The position in all these is that religion is the product of ignorance and fear, religion contributes to violence and hatred, and that humanity would be better off without religion.

Of course, the opposite is also true. Religious leaders have been at the forefront of movements that advance human rights and human dignity. In my home country, religious leaders, including some from my own Unitarian and Universalist forebears, were leaders in the movement to end slavery, the struggle to bring rights to women, and in the Civil Rights movement.

We can immediately think of heroic contributions of people of faith all over the world: Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, etc. People of faith – far too many – have died as martyrs while struggling for the rights of others.

So, which is true? Is religion a force that instils fear, ignorance and hatred, and that supports dehumanisation and oppression? Or is religion the source of teachings that have inspired some of humanity's greatest humanitarian leaders – people like Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr?

The answer is that religion is both. To see religion as an evil force that justifies murder is only part of the picture. To see religion as the source of enlightenment and compassion is also to see only part of the picture.

Our great challenge, as religious leaders who are committed to furthering understanding, freedom, partnership and dialogue, is how to help make religion act out of its highest impulses?

If we return to the role that religion played much earlier in human history, when most people lived as hunters and gatherers, we see a very different role. The most striking thing is that the boundary between the religious and what we call the 'secular' is blurred—if it exists at all. Religion is science. Religion is philosophy. Religion is myth and cosmology. Religion is culture. Religion is a way of expressing the identity of the group. This role, in expressing tribal identity, is critical for understanding how religion can be used to justify all manner of violence and warfare. Religion in some hunting and gathering communities had little to do with morality. Ancient cultures are filled with gods and goddesses who behave rather badly.

As societies developed, with larger and permanent agricultural

settlements, what we would call 'governments' emerged. Religion came to play a larger role in giving legitimacy to the rulers. Imagine a new king taking on the throne without priests, without religious ceremony. Unthinkable.

Another key change occurred. Religion took on the role of teaching ethical standards and the fundamental human values of compassion, kindness, reciprocity, honesty, fidelity and generosity.

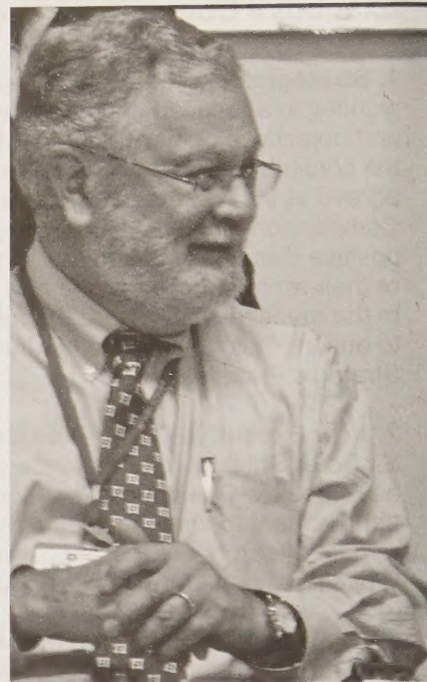
Here we have the seeds of the great tension in religious traditions, which has done much to shape human history for good and for ill. The tension is that religion is both a

miser of power and the moral critic. On the one hand, religion gives divine authority to the rulers. Consider how many rulers in early civilisations were seen as gods. Think of the idea of the divine right of kings, where the rulers were seen as gods, but held their position of power as an expression of God's will. It is a short step to religion declaring the enemies of the state to be the enemies of the gods or, in monotheism, the enemies of God. If our king is ambitious and aggressive, the enemies he makes become my enemies, and enemies of God. Soldiers always fight for God and country.

And yet, if religion has been the great legitimiser, it has also been the great liberator. Every major religion and every culture value compassion and sharing. Every culture says causing pain and suffering to another human being is wrong. Every culture has a core of fairness and justice founded upon reciprocity. These core values and how we should relate to one another are in every human heart.

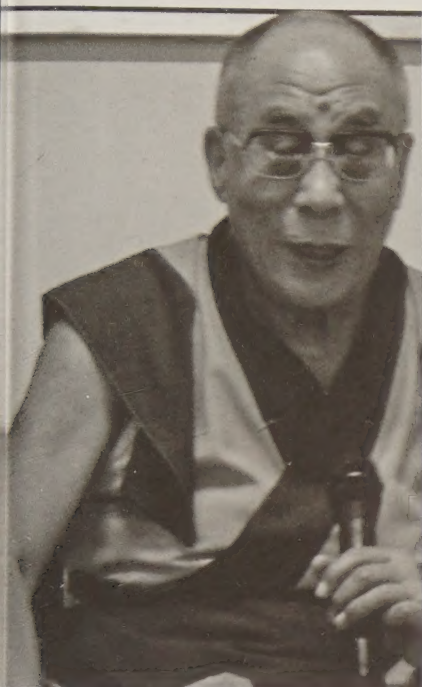
Every mother who has loved her child, and modelled sacrifice, has sewn the seed of social revolution. Every family who has taken in an orphan or who has shared food with hungry neighbours has inspired a vision of human community where everyone is loved, where everyone has a place, where everyone is treated with respect. When we take the core values of compassion, generosity and justice to heart we cannot be indifferent to oppression, to dehumanisation, to discrimination. Every person who has ever experienced being loved, being cared for, being respected, carries in their heart the seed of a vision for human community.

The great religious figures – Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad – all shared this common vision of human possibility. Consider the Buddhist emphasis on compassion and awareness, of that tradition's teaching that when we awaken we will see that what divides us is an illusion that causes great suffering. What connects us is what is ultimately real. Consider the teaching of Jesus that to feed or clothe the



Peter Morales, president of the UUA, speaking at the Religious Freedom Congress in Seattle.

Make religion a force for good



Lama at the International Association
RF (IARF logo left)

humble and wretched person has the same moral standing as doing unto him. What more radical statement of equality could there be?

Think about what it must have been like to hear the Prophet Muhammad declare that there is no God but God in a culture where every tribal group had its own god. His statement was a radical departure. It said, in effect, these gods, these symbols of our separation and of our divisive allegiances to kin and place are all false. To declare that there is but one God is to declare all of us linked to one

ce and one destiny.

the United States, long dominated by Protestant Christianity, first question people ask about a religion or even a denomination Protestantism is, 'What do they believe?' This is so much part of culture that most people think this way of classifying religions is al and universal.

rs is a religious culture with a long history of theological argu- . Usually these arguments, which I personally find tedious in extreme, are supported by selected and very selective references ripture. Each side has its own texts and arguments. Many think entral religious question before us is to believe the right things. y religious groups have statements of belief embodied in creeds. embers of my own religious movement, Unitarian Universal- often get trapped in awkward religious discussions. Our own ement has no statement of belief and has long been adamantly sed to one. We accept that good people have different opinions. ever, we are at a terrible disadvantage in a culture in which peo- sk you what Unitarian Universalists believe. (My advice to you ver to ask one of my fellow UUs what he or she believes. You kely to get an answer that is long, meandering, boring, and cong- g. This is especially true because we are a wordy people, and so because we find the question awkward and unsatisfactory does ean we won't spend the better part of an hour trying to answer

ow have the answer. Luckily, it is very brief. Today if someone me what Unitarian Universalists believe, I tell them we believe have asked the wrong question. Religion is less about what we ve than about what we love. And if you and I love the same s, then at some profound level we have the same religion. elieve that if we are to make religion – no, if we are to make our ons – a powerful force for human rights, then *you and I have to e right questions.*

e wrong question leads us to focus on disagreements. And, we

become defensive and argumentative. I have a list of the wrong questions we can ask about our religious traditions.

- What is it that divides us?
- Who has injured whom?
- Who has suffered more?
- What are your grievances?

I do not suggest denial of differences, suffering or grievances. I do suggest that these are not routes to opening dialogue across traditions. These questions take us to a place of defending a position and will put us in immediate contact with our pain.

A better set of questions would be:

- What do you find most inspiring and meaningful in your tradition?
- What is the core of spirituality and religious experience in your tradition?
- Where do our separate traditions most closely coincide?
- What visions of the future do we share?

Questions like these open us to one another. They allow us to see our common humanity, feel our common experience and revisit our common aspirations. They emphasise what connects us. This discovery is what unites the great religious teachers of the ages. They have seen that the violence, the suffering, hatred, the brokenness of this world is not necessary.

When we approach one another with questions that open us to one another, we move toward the side of religion that has always been a liberating force in human history. When we explore what we hold in common, we discover core values like compassion, reverence, community and peace.

When we turn away from the aspects of our religious traditions that are narrow, tribal, and that give legitimacy to rulers and to their agendas to gather more power we will unleash a powerful force for change. None of our religious traditions teaches a moral vision that makes it all right for a tiny fraction of people to control the vast majority of the world's wealth. None of our traditions teaches us to subjugate and mistreat others.

I began by stating the obvious: religion has been used to justify and motivate horrors. Millions have died and hundreds of millions have suffered in the name of God. Each time religion has been misused to do great harm in the world, religious leaders have allowed it to happen. Sometimes religious leaders have actively supported murder, torture and theft. More often, but just as culpably, religious leaders have failed to speak out.

If the religious traditions we cherish and teach, are to be a force for advancing human rights, it will only happen if religious leaders are faithful to the best that resides in their tradition. The temptation to garner the favour of the powerful is always there. Our true calling, however, is to speak for what is compassionate and what is just. There is always going to be risk. Let us not deceive ourselves. Think of the leaders who have been killed, jailed, vilified.

Can religion be a force for human good and for human rights? Absolutely. This is beyond doubt. But we can only move as fast and as far as our collective courage will take us.

We are bearers of precious traditions, of beautiful visions of harmony, love, awareness, and true peace. Let us resolve once more to be passionate, stubborn, relentless, kind, vocal, and effective religious voices.

Peter Morales is the president of the Unitarian Universalist Association of American congregations.

Glasgow Unitarians celebrate 200 years

By Lyanne Mitchell

September 28th marked exactly 200 years since what had been a fluctuating group of Glasgow Dissenters banded together to form the Glasgow Unitarian Church. Two years later, they had appointed a young minister, and built a new church in the city centre. To the dismay of many Calvinistic Christian citizens, the new church contained an organ, which made a joyful noise on Sunday mornings and evenings too.

The current successors of those members celebrated this Bi-Centenary throughout September and into October. Festivities began with a recital on that very organ, originally built by Snetzler in 1747, and now situated in Glasgow University's Concert Hall. It is encased in a cabinet designed to mirror the front elevation of the larger Greek temple-styled church which had to be built in 1856 to accommodate all the members. Dr Stuart Campbell, recently retired from the University's music department, put together a programme of music from the lifetime of the instrument, to demonstrate its range and power.

The main library in Glasgow, the beautiful Mitchell building, is close by our present premises and it hosted a small display about the history of our church. This will tour around other libraries in the city, since founder Stephen Mitchell, along with other prominent 19th Century citizens, was a Unitarian.

The Rev Andrew Hill led our Anniversary Service in the Trades Hall, where the original band of Unitarians had held their services before their new church could be built. He has a special connection with Glasgow Unitarians, since his ancestor William McKean visited the Unitarian church in 1825, out of curiosity, and, captivated by the sincerity of the minister and the beauty of the accompanied singing, went on to become a Unitarian minister. He was the first in a family which has produced ministers through five generations. Andrew spoke of the political situation in the country 200, and 100 years ago, and today, and he urged us to carry the Unitarian message



The Glasgow Unitarians celebrate their bi-centenary at the Banqueting Hall, Glasgow City Chambers

of openness, commonsense and respect forward into a third Century. Those who attended this service were presented with a commemorative illustrated booklet, prepared by Margaret Paxton, telling what we know of our church's history.

From there, the assembly of over 200 people – members and their families, Unitarians from across Scotland and further afield, members of associated organisations and city dignitaries walked around to the spectacular Victorian City chambers, where a Reception was laid on in the magnificent Banqueting Hall. There Baillie McMaster welcomed us with a speech that praised our inclusiveness, which is a very contemporary issue. We were entertained by members of the Sounds International choir, introduced by member Lyanne Mitchell.

We are happy that the Lord Provost's Fund for Children benefitted by over £700 from our anniversary collection.

Lyanne Mitchell is a member of the Glasgow Unitarians.

Music society is open to all who love tunes

By Penny Johnson

I am a committed member of the Unitarian Music Society, taking a full and active part in its life. Over the years I have seen it change dramatically. There was a time when the emphasis was on church music, with a definite leaning towards organ music, and when every conference featured an Organ Recital by a distinguished organist.

Other organists who attended conferences at Manchester College (now Harris Manchester College) Oxford virtually queued up for time to practise on the College organ. Those days have now gone. Nowadays we meet at the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre, Great Hucklow and occasionally at Ammerdown Retreat Centre, Radstock near Bath – neither of which possesses an organ designed for recitals. The Society is no longer the Unitarian Church Music Society, but the Unitarian Music Society, which does, as part of its remit, strive to improve music in our worship services. It is open to everyone who enjoys music. A few members play instruments, but they are a small minority. Some members are active listeners.

I write this because I have been made aware of just how many people love music, but feel disinclined to join the Music Society because they don't play an instrument. Also they are clinging to an image of the Society which no longer exists.

Granted, there are professional musicians amongst us who inspire and encourage the others, and therefore help to raise the musical standard. We play and sing everything and anything, and in our informal concerts often include non-musical items such as poems, stories and humorous passages.

People of all ages belong to the Society, and happily come together with music as a unifying factor. We offer generous financial support to young Unitarian musicians (instrumentalists and singers) and know that we all gain greatly from this interaction of different age groups.

The next gathering of the Music Society is at the Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow 23-25 February. We have called it, 'Catching Heaven in a Note' when we shall be exploring the power of music in many faiths and cultures to evoke the spiritual. It is open to members and non-members. Helen Merritt is the organiser, and for more details please contact her on 0151-625-5488 or e-mail: richardandhelenmerritt@hotmail.com. If you should wish to become a member, please contact Adrienne Wilson, our Secretary, telephone 01483-421905, email: adie@adiewilson.co.uk or refer to our website, www.unitarianmusic.org.uk.

Music Society Conferences are so very enjoyable. Why not come along and see for yourself?

David Shaw welcomed at Upper Chapel

By Valerie Walker

Saturday, 30 October was a perfect autumn day; the sun shone from a clear blue sky and everywhere in the city of Sheffield trees sparkled with their many seasonal colours. What a lovely time for Upper Chapel in the city centre to welcome the new Unitarian minister.

Chapel members, their families and friends were joined by guests, some from Great Hucklow where David was previously minister at The Old Chapel – including several staying at The Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre there – and visitors from further afield; Unitarians and those from other churches and other faiths.

The service, conducted by the Rev Ernest Baker, focused on 'Ministry' and its representation within the liberal tradition of the Unitarian community at Upper Chapel. The 'Ministry' of the whole community, of many minds and voices together, helped by someone they have specially chosen.

Readings on this theme were given by the Rev June Pettitt (minister at Underbank Chapel), Barbara Laycock (Chair of the Upper Chapel Trustees), Alan Walker (chair of the congregation) and the Rev David Shaw spoke the Rev Gordon McKeeman's poem on 'Ministry is all that we do together...'



(l-r) Alan Walker, the Rev June Pettitt, the Lord Mayor of Sheffield (Councillor Alan Law JP), and the Lady Mayoress (Nicola Ashton), the Rev David Shaw, Barbara Laycock and the Rev Ernest Baker. Photo by John Hewerdine

Last, but not least, David's wife Liz Shaw gave a humorous reflection – using the 'Musings about Ministers' Wives' written a century or more ago by the well-known Baptist minister the Rev Charles Spurgeon – on what nowadays could be called the BOGOF offer, how chapels get the efforts of the minister's wife for nothing while employing the minister!

The Lord Mayor of Sheffield (Councillor Alan Law JP) and his Lady Mayoress (Mrs Nicola Ashton) were guests of honour for the afternoon and after the service, when everyone gathered in the Channing Hall for tea, he gave a speech welcoming David to the city.

Not a formal service of 'Induction' or 'Ordination' but an afternoon of welcome and shared celebration, music and words of friendship and humour honouring this 'noblest of callings'.

Valerie Walker is a member at Oxford

General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

WELSH DEPARTMENT SECRETARY

Part-time (0.5wte) Salary approx £27k pro rata inclusive of 8.5% pension contribution

The General Assembly is seeking a Welsh Department Secretary to promote, develop and encourage Unitarian objectives, purpose and achievement in Wales. This is a wide-ranging role working closely with the Welsh Department. They will provide leadership and organisational development for the South and South East Wales Districts and promote Unitarianism throughout Wales. It is home-based with travel across Wales.

For an informal discussion please contact Derek McAuley, Chief Officer on 020 7240 2384, Dmcauley@unitarian.org.uk. To talk to the current post-holder ring Rev Eric Jones on 01685 873 440 or eric.anne.jones@gmail.com

For an information pack please contact Mary-Jean Hennis mhennis@unitarian.org.uk or telephone 020 7240 2384

Closing date: 7 December 2010
Interviews: January 2011

Cymanfa Cyffredinol o Eglwys Undodaidd a Christnogion Rhydd YSGRIFENNYDD y GYFADRAN UNDODAIDD yng NGHMYRU

Rhan-amser (0.5 cyfwerth gwaith wythnos) Cyflog tua £ 27k pro rata sy'n cynnwys cyfraniad pensiwn 8.5%

Mae'r Gymanfa Gyffredinol yn chwilio am Ysgrifennydd i'r Gyfadrann Undodaidd i hyrwyddo, datblygu a hybu amcanion, pwrpasau a chyflawniadau yr Undodiaid yng Nghymru.

Mae hon yn rôl eang a bydd yn gweithio'n agos gyda Chyfadrann Cymru. Byddant yn darparu arweinyddiaeth a datblygiadau sefydliadol ar gyfer y ddwy Gymdeithas yn Ne a De-ddwyrain Cymru yn ogystal a hybu Undodiaeth ledled Cymru. Bydd deiliad yn gweithio o adref a bydd disgwyl iddo/iddi deithio ar draws Cymru.

Am drafodaeth anffurfiol cysylltwch â Derek McAuley, y Prif Swyddog, ar 020 7240 2384, Dmcauley@unitarian.org.uk Os am siarad â deiliad presennol y swydd ffoniwch y Parch Eric Jones ar 01685 873440 neu eric.anne.jones@gmail.com Am becyn gwybodaeth, cysylltwch â Mary-Jean Hennis mhennis@unitarian.org.uk neu ffoniwch 020 7240 2384 Dyddiad cau: 7 Rhagfyr, 2010
Cyfweliadau: Ionawr 2011

An inclusive vision of our faith

To the Editor:

I was sorry to see the letter from Ashley Hills, whom I admire, suggesting that you cannot be a Unitarian and believe in more or less than one God, and an article in a similar vein from Tony Cutter suggesting that we should only promote a Christian message so as not to alienate newcomers from Christian churches. I do not, of course, mean that *The Inquirer* should not publish such articles; rather that I am disappointed that we cannot have a more inclusive vision of what it means to be Unitarian. One of the many things I value about being Unitarian is the freedom to think about religion, and explore many different spiritual traditions: Unitarianism, Universalism, humanism, Buddhism, atheism, liberal Christianity, pantheism, Paganism, Judaism, Hinduism, and so on. Of course there is always a danger of 'pick-and-mix' spirituality, that people will focus on the easy bits and ignore the challenging bits, but this can be corrected by a deep engagement with our own tradition of Unitarianism.

Occasionally someone says, 'but how can you be a Unitarian and an atheist or one of the other traditions listed above?' It's simple – you love and cherish your own tradition, but you respect and value the insights of others as a corrective to any blind-spots in your own tradition. When writing sermons/addresses, my approach is to use the insights of different religious traditions to illuminate my theme. So for instance, if my address was about compassion, I would draw mainly on Buddhism, Judaism and Christianity; if it was about hospitality, I would draw mainly on Heathenry and Religio Romana; if it was about the concept of a Messiah, I would draw mainly on Judaism, Christianity and Gnosticism; if it was about religion and science, I would draw on atheist spirituality, among other things.

I count myself as a non-theist, in that I do not think the Divine is an entity with a personality; rather it is an experience or an all-pervading quality, and we can experience it through many images

and archetypes. But I wholeheartedly embrace the Unitarian ethos and tradition, and many other Unitarians before me have held this view; so I do not think it makes me any less of a Unitarian. I also value the insights of other Unitarians, whether they are theist or non-theist, Christian or otherwise.

Yvonne Aburrow

Part-time ministry student,
member, Frenchay Chapel,
editor of *The Unitarian*

Social justice is important to our faith

To the editor:

I have been asked to write to you on behalf of the Unitarian Woman's Group (UWG). At our AGM 2010 concern was expressed at the apparent low priority that Social Justice issues seem to be regarded by many of our congregations (responses from 'Difficult Choices').

Whilst we applaud Derek McAuley's initiatives in the area of Social Justice, such as actively supporting the Equality Act 2010 which permits civil partnerships in religious premises (as proposed by the General Assembly Annual Meetings in 2010) and work connected with Faith Schools, we ask if any action has been taken on the GA (2009) motion, tabled by UWG, on the proposed appointment of a full-time Social Responsibility Officer. This motion was passed almost unanimously.

The UWG regards Social Justice matters as one of the key components in our liberal tradition. Most of the delegates at the GA 2009 thought so too. How can we effect change when some motions appear not to be acted upon?

Sheila Jones

Chair, Unitarian Women's Group

Time to challenge faith schools

To the Editor:

I write in support of Rosemary Ruston's call (*Inquirer* 2 October) for the national movement to adopt a cause, particularly the cause of faith schools. I am appalled that my daughter-in-law is ready to convert to Roman Catholicism and have our only

grandchild baptised a Roman Catholic because the best school in the area is RC maintained, although I understand her motives.

All church schools practice selection, applying their own criteria as to who may enter, leaving the state schools to mop up the remainder. Where is the hue and cry, when grammar schools attract such indignation? When only 5% of the population attend any place of worship regularly, why are a third of schools under the auspices of a religious establishment?

Are we for or against equality of opportunity? This is a cause we can and should support.

Beryl Payne

Chatham Unitarians

Inquirer letters policy

Letters should be succinct. It is preferable that they are sent by email to inquirer@btinternet.com

Typewritten or legible handwritten submissions may be sent to the editor at 46A Newmarket Road, Cringleford, Norwich NR4 6UF

Letters should be signed with the writer's full name and, if applicable, the name of the group or congregation with which the writer is affiliated. A postal address and telephone number are required, for verification purposes.

Letters will be edited for length and content and may appear in an excerpted form. Any affiliations listed with letter writers' names are for identification purposes only, and should not suggest the view expressed is representative of that body.



Octagon chapel defies the odds and grows

By Mark Leslie

The past year at the Octagon Chapel in Norwich can be summed up in one word. Growth.

Spiritually, with a superb range of speakers who have travelled from far and wide to fill the famous pulpit, and numerically as the strength of the congregation has continued to go in the right direction.

It was not so many years ago that the old chapel may only count 15 people in its pews on a Sunday morning.

Now, regularly there are three times that figure. Also, it is not uncommon for the Sunday Club alone to host up to 10 children.

There are many things, of course, that make a church a vibrant growing place. Ideas are key and organisation vital. But to that must be added a sense of community, where people coming along get a warm welcome and feel they can

play a role in a relaxed atmosphere.

Events like the annual garden party at the country home of Treasurer Geoff Bluckert, are a highlight of the year. As is the annual picnic in August at the old Unitarian burial ground at Hapton.

But outreach is important too. Whether it be the jazz band providing the entertainment for visitors to the chapel for the Spring Fair or the regular visits to the nearby Doughty's Hospital care home, where children and adults from the congregation lead residents in old-time singing, under the direction of Judith Farmer, of the chapel's social responsibility group.

And that outreach also has an international flavour. Whether it be the long-running English classes for asylum seekers or the highly-successful visit from members of the congregation of our sister church in Marosvarhely, Romania, last year.

All at the Octagon were very proud to see the children of the Sunday Club get their Chalice Awards this summer after working so hard. And they have also provided a further type of growth for the chapel members to admire – an impressive vegetable garden.

The Octagon is well known in Norwich as a place where some of the finest music can be heard, often at the marvellous Octagon Concert Series (now into its 27th year).

But its impressive organ is now being heard by many other citizens as they either attend services or events such as weddings or civil partnerships.

Standing still is never an option at a chapel such as the Octagon. But we hope that the work we are doing today will take Unitarian ideas forward into the future.

Mark Leslie is a member of the Norwich congregation.



(Clockwise from top left) Children of the Octagon Sunday Club receive their green Chalice Award. Visitors from Romania arrive. The Octagon's got talent as the residents of Doughty's Hospital in Norwich are entertained. A lovely late June day blesses the Octagon's garden party in Swardeston. Photos by Mary Rae



Non-Subscribers centenary dinner

This year the General Synod of the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland celebrates its 100th Anniversary. The Synod was founded in February 1910 and special services were held across the denomination. The special celebrations culminated with a grand centenary dinner held on Friday, 22 October, at the Belfast Harbour Commissioners Office. Over 100 guests attended including distinguished representatives from the Presbyterian, Methodist, Church of Ireland, Roman Catholic churches and the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches.

The Lord Mayor of Belfast, Cllr Patrick Convery was also in attendance.

In photo: (l-r) The Rev Dr Ann Peart- Vice President of the GA, Very Rev Padraig Murphy representing Cardinal Sean Brady, Rt Rev Sam Peden, Moderator of the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland, Right Rev Dr Norman Hamilton, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Lord Mayor, Cllr Patrick Convery and Mervyn McCullagh, Chief Executive Irish Inter Church Meeting. Photo by the Newtownards Chronicle



Hinckley enjoys a day of celebrations

Sunday, 7 November was a very busy day at the Great Meeting, Hinckley, with three main events spanning the whole day. The morning service was a celebration marking the Congregation's 348th Anniversary with over 60 present and included the welcoming of three new members, Yvonne Thompson, David Heppinstall and Eric Ottey (see photo above). The Banners, that were at the front of the Unitarian Sunday School at the annual 'Treats' march through the town in past years, were displayed during the service and Hugh Atkins music, that accompanied the singing of parables at the 'Sermons', was played

on the organ.

After a 'Sharing Lunch' it was time for the Sunday School Reunion, with a huge display of photographs, documents, registers, etc. (Participants look at displays in photo below.) In addition, all films/videos that could be found of past activities were brought together on DVD and run continuously throughout the event on a large screen. The attendance justified the hard work put in, with many old acquaintances renewed and memories revived. People had come from as far away as Cornwall for the event and could have gone on longer, renewing friendships and talking about the old days.

To round the day off, there was an evening Concert in the Chapel by the Burbage Silver Band, bringing back memories of when that same Band led the Unitarian Sunday School at the 'Treats'. The Concert finished with the rendition of 'Onward Christian Soldiers', the hymn that was always played each year as the Sunday School returned from their Party Field and up the hill back to the Chapel.

It was a long day, but very rewarding for the organisers and for all those who attended.

— Geoff Oliver



Fellowships available for teachers

Farmington Fellowships exist for teachers of religious education and head teachers at Harris Manchester College in Oxford during the Academic Year 2011-2012. The fellowship covers the cost of tuition, board and lodging where appropriate, essential local travel and, by negotiation with the school, the salary of a replacement teacher up to point 6 of the main pay scale. The normal period is for a university term.

It is also possible for people to study at many other universities in the UK.

For further details please contact the Rev Peter Hewis at **peter.hewis@hmc.ox.ac.uk** or on 01865 372265 and he will pass on details to the institute.

Application forms can also be downloaded from the Farmington website, **www.farmington.ac.uk**, available under Farmington Fellowships.

— Peter Hewis